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California Islands Research Update

Researchers shared findings in archeology, marine biology, geology, ecology, human history and related fields with other participants in the Fourth California Islands Symposium, which ran March 23-25 at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History (SBMNH). More than 90 papers dealt with Channel Islands-related subjects.

Special sessions presented information ranging from island ranching and creation of the Channel Islands National Park to Geographic Information Systems technology and its potential uses beyond map-making (such as analyzing rainfall's effect on a variety of soils).

Abalone withering syndrome, pollution-afflicted seabird populations, restoration of island ecosystems, and other current problems were also addressed in the symposium hosted by the museum and the National Park Service. Abstracts of the papers are available from JoAnne Hankey at (805) 682-4711, ext. 302.

Rare Chumash Harpoon Shafts Acquired

Three red ocher-stained harpoon foreshafts, of a kind once used by the Chumash and the neighboring Gabrielinos, were recently purchased by SBMNH. They are, said Anthropology Curator John R. Johnson, "extremely rare. Less than ten of these foreshafts are known to exist worldwide."

The foreshafts served as detachable heads set into a mainshaft that the native fisherman held as he harpooned large prey, such as seals or swordfish.

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Oakland Museum Gains Power

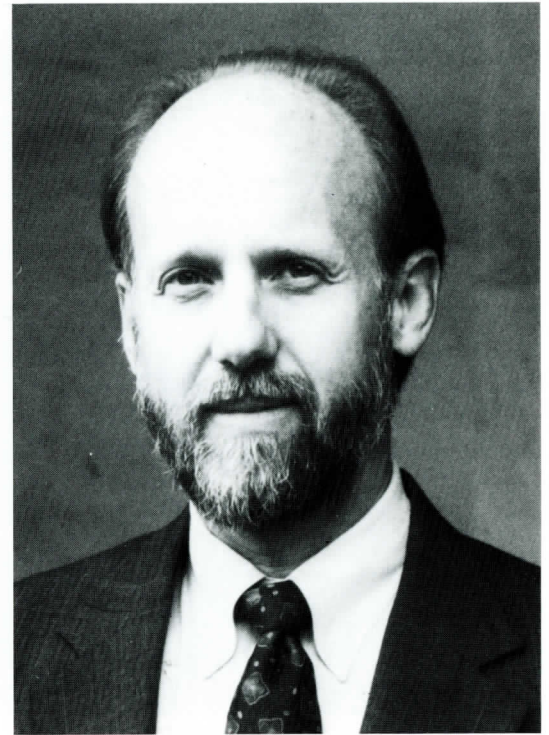
By Gary Robinson

After 22 years as director of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Dr. Dennis M. Power has been named to head The Oakland Museum. During his tenure, the museum experienced a ten-fold increase in its budget, from \$250,000 in 1972 to \$2.4 million today. With the addition of new facilities, such as the Center for Research and Collections, expanded educational program offerings, and renovated exhibit halls using interactive approaches to learning, the museum has received national recognition for the quality of its programs.

One of Power's special efforts was the Sea Center, situated on Stearns Wharf. This satellite exhibit hall is jointly supported by the museum and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to foster public awareness of the natural and cultural heritage of our local marine region, which encompasses the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. The Sea Center receives 75,000 to 100,000 visitors annually and conducts numerous educational programs for school children from surrounding communities.

While the Sea Center can be called a success today, Power's proposal to embark on the project in the early 1980s met with resistance from museum staff and trustees who worried that the project would drain funds from the main museum. However, several circumstances developed in its favor. The first was the designation of the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary in 1980. With the Sanctuary in place a partnership was forged between the museum and NOAA to develop a common visitor center. The second circumstance was the large amount of oil industry activity occurring in the Santa Barbara Channel in the early 1980s. The oil industry represented a largely untapped source of financial support.

After several years of fundraising, the Sea Center was constructed in 1985. As a finishing touch the large gray whale model was delivered by helicopter and hung inside before the windows were installed. In June, 1986, the Sea Center finally opened full-time to visitors, but just five days later a devastating fire closed it. One year later it reopened, and with several new exhibits. To date, nearly half a million visitors have entered its doors to learn about the natural resources of the Santa Barbara Channel.



Dr. Dennis Power, father of the Sea Center has left the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History after 22 years.

From planting the idea of a marine museum, to developing partnerships, to unwavering support in getting the Sea Center operational following the fire, Power has demonstrated his vision of what the museum can accomplish. His skillful management of the partnership that exists between the museum and NOAA has resulted in a long-term cooperative project between the two agencies.

The Sea Center is one of many gifts that Dennis Power has been instrumental in providing to the Santa Barbara community. We thank you for your efforts in creating and managing the Sea Center and will remember you through our future exhibits and educational programs. We wish you great success in your new position with The Oakland Museum.

Marine biologist Gary Robinson directs the Sea Center.